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**Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant Construction in Turkey: The Impact of Conspiracy
Theories on the Relationship Between the State and the People**

Master's Thesis

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Introduction

The Context

This thesis is about the conspiratorial narratives regarding Turkey's first-ever nuclear power plant construction process of Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). The main aim of this thesis is to explore the causing effects of conspiracy theories related to the Akkuyu NPP project. There are numerous discussions on nuclear power plants worldwide from the perspectives of safety and the environment. Some argue that nuclear power plants are not safe, and a minor problem may cause a catastrophic explosion. On the other hand, some point out that nuclear power plants are safe and sustainable for the environment (Hinnawi 1977: 1-3). Examining NPP narratives is significant since the topic is global, and therefore, one event or incident related to one NPP affects the folk narratives in another place. One accident or happening related to one NPP in the world opens discussions for the people to talk about NPPs in their countries. In other words, a NPP narrative in one place can form the basis for another NPP narrative. Through the lens of folk narratives, it is valuable to see how a particular NPP narrative develops.

This work focuses explicitly on conspiracy theories related to Akkuyu NPP in Mersin city, Turkey. Akkuyu NPP is not active yet, but it is under construction and is to open in 2023. Since NPPs' construction is an ongoing debate, narratives, posts, and comments on Akkuyu NPP are plenty.

Choice of Topic

I was interested to the Akkuyu NPP itself since it is located in my hometown Mersin. I witnessed heated discussions every time I visited my hometown, especially after 2011. In 2017, I met with a free-lance journalist from the UK. He was conducting interviews with locals, and he asked for my help to translate some of the interview materials. I have noticed that people have different opinions on the construction process. However, the most interesting thing I came across is that most people were not sharing their opinions on environmental concerns. Instead, most of the commentary was highly political, and people were trying to detect the hidden or secret plot behind the construction of the Akkuyu NPP. In addition, there was mistrust towards the Turkish government, which pushed me to think that the lack of trust might cause conspiracy theories to appear.

Thus, my research questions are: How conspiracy theories related to Akkuyu NPP appear? What elements affect or trigger this conspiratorial mindset? How do a society's culture, history, and political culture play a role for conspiracy theories to appear?

Novelty and relevance

When I started working on this topic, I noticed a significant amount of research related to conspiracy theories and nuclear power plants. The studies I have read about the Akkuyu NPP were focusing on policy analysis or discussing the environmental concerns related to the NPPs. Some pieces examine conspiracy theories in Turkey, but there is not any single work, to my knowledge, that investigates conspiracy theories related to the Akkuyu NPP. Therefore, I chose to work on this topic.

Thesis structure

I start with a brief history of the Akkuyu NPP project to introduce what is going on with the power plant construction. Then, I examine the concepts of conspiracy theories and the related theoretical discussions. This introduction helps me to point out the way I define conspiracy theory throughout the thesis. In addition, examining the history of research into conspiracy theories touches the issue of defining what a conspiracy theory is. By presenting a historical overview, it is possible to see how dynamic the field of study is. I also write about folklore and its relationship with conspiracy theories to show how conspiracy theories are a part of folk narratives, and the internet is a source to gather data. Introducing internet folklore is crucial for this thesis since I conducted an online fieldwork because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The last part of the chapter is dedicated to the specific Turkish conspiracy narratives. The overview of the Turkish conspiratorial mindset helps me to evaluate my findings from the perspectives of social, cultural, historical, and political characteristics that Turkish society has.

In the second chapter, I specify the conditions of my fieldwork and my focus groups. I introduce my fieldwork methodology and explain why choosing netnography is significant for this thesis. In addition, I re-visit some works that examine conspiracy theories on the internet.

In the third chapter, I focus on my fieldwork materials and my findings. I start by discussing two narratives that I detected in some posts, Chernobyl, and Fukushima-related conspiracy theories. I noticed that Turkish society remembers past incidents and utilizes these narratives to prove their criticisms towards the Akkuyu NPP project. Therefore, presenting those narratives and giving a brief introduction is crucial for my analysis.

In conclusion, I reflect on my findings and examination. It will be possible to see the reasoning behind some conspiracy theories that I mention throughout the thesis. It is possible to observe how conspiracy theories do not happen suddenly, but they have a social, cultural, and political background. In light of this idea, my conclusion states that conspiracy theories related to Akkuyu NPP are quite dynamic towards events about nuclear power plants and are not separated from the country's politics.

I chose to gather materials from the internet, specifically from Facebook groups and forums. It is significant to point out that word-of-mouth research is still an important information source to find conspiracy theories, and sometimes, they are more impactful than those on the internet (Astapova 2020: 398). However, the Covid-19 pandemic pushed this thesis to change its direction regarding the fieldwork methodology.

1: Background and Theoretical Part

History of Power Plant Planning in Turkey

In 1955, the Turkish and the US governments signed the “Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atomic Energy.” As a result of this agreement, Turkey founded the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority (Nas 2015: 164). This institution aimed to train personnel and prepare the state for atomic research. The exploration of an area suitable for the power plant started in 1965. In 1974, Akkuyu, a region in Mersin located in the southern Mediterranean part, was chosen as a suitable place for construction by the state (Yapıcı 2015: 42). Since then, there have been plenty of disputes and controversies about the nuclear power plant construction in terms of environmental and ecological concerns (Nas 2015: 164).

The project to construct Turkey's first NPP re-emerged in 2010 (Nas 2015: 164). An agreement was signed between the governments of Russia and Turkey in 2010. On that day, *Akkuyu Nükleer* was founded as a private company as a part of *Rosatom*, a Russian company specializing in nuclear power. According to the agreement, Rosatom holds 50% of the shares (Yapıcı 2015: 50). Rosatom was responsible for the engineering and education processes related to the nuclear power plant. The construction officially started in Akkuyu in 2011.

In 2012, an information center was created by *Akkuyu Nükleer* company to inform the public about the details of the project. Since then, it has organized numerous public relations events, especially during national and religious holidays (Nas 2015: 168). The company also initiated a digital nuclear dictionary in Turkish to inform the public about the advantages of the Akkuyu project. The dictionary is not done yet but Rosatom released a teaser video on its Facebook account. To persuade the ones against the Akkuyu project, many advertisements about the positive sides of nuclear power were published by the *Akkuyu Nükleer* company in the timeline.

In 2015, a TV advertisement and outdoor posters were released not only in Mersin, the city where the Turkish state is building Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant but in all major cities. In addition to informative websites and digital nuclear dictionary, posters and TV advertisements focused on ecological or environmental concerns. The advertisement was titled “Powerful Turkey’s Safe Energy” [*Güçlü Türkiye’nin güvenli enerjisi*] (cf. Figure

1). This advertisement aimed to decrease anxieties about safety and individual concerns about possible disasters. The term “Powerful Turkey” was introduced to increase the feeling of ownership of the project by the people. It is a phrase used by the government to promote national goals in other areas as well. For every project and policy like the new airport project in Istanbul or building a canal in Istanbul, the government uses the term Powerful Turkey. This way of doing advertisements gives an idea about what the public might think about the nuclear power plant construction. Advertisements showed that the organizers of this campaign are not only concerned about the environmental impact of Akkuyu but also about the security and future of the project.

Also, there is a sentence in the advertisement with smaller font: “Turkey is making the largest investment in its history and is becoming independent of buying energy from outside. This pride belongs to Turkey, and this investment belongs to all of us!” [*Türkiye tarihinin en büyük yatırımını gerçekleştiriyor, enerjide dışa bağımlı olmaktan kurtuluyor. Bu gurur Türkiye’nin, bu yatırım hepimizin!*]. The promotion of national *unity* hints about how a NPP construction is more than just a facility. It is also about the nationalization of energy and symbolizes different ideas like national unity, independence, and brighter tomorrows (Nas 2015: 169).

The debates about nuclear power, which persisted despite the advertisement campaign, encouraged the circulation of various conspiracy and folk narratives about the Akkuyu NPP. There had been discussions about the Akkuyu NPP in previous years, some were in favor of the project some were not: however, only a few hours after Turkey and Russia signed an agreement about the NPP in May 2010, social media channels filled with conspiracy theories. These conspiracy theories regarding Akkuyu NPP are different from previously known conspiratorial narratives about nuclear power plants, such as Chernobyl-related conspiracy theories, because they were not trying to reveal the unknown about something that happened in the past. The focus is on the possible outcomes of the NPP and future plans of some secret plotters or actors. Currently, the construction process is still going on, and the initial plan is to open the first reactor in 2023.

What is a Conspiracy Theory?

Michael Butter, a leading scholar studying conspiracy theories, defines them as narratives that “assert the existence of a covertly operating group of people – the conspirators- who seek, from base motives and by underhand means, to achieve a certain end” (2020: 9). The word *conspiracy* comes from the Latin verb *conspirare* and means to be in harmony (Butter 2020: 9). Moreover, the two Latin words *con* and *spirare* mean with and breathe (Byford 2011: 20). Therefore, as Butter puts it, a conspiracy is not the work of one individual. A conspiracy is a work by a group of people. The word theory means a guess or suggestion without any supporting evidence. In the light of this etymological analysis, it might be possible to say that a conspiracy theory is something that a group of people forms, and it does not rely on concrete or supporting evidence (Butter 2020: 10).

Michael Barkun, a US political scientist, stated that there are three fundamental characteristics for conspiracy theories; nothing happens by accident; nothing is as it seems; and everything is connected (2003: 2). Historian Geoffrey Cubitt followed the same view as Barkun and argued that the essence of conspiracy theory is about forming a dualistic idea of good and evil. This dualistic idea, according to Cubitt, appears when something is kept in secrecy (1989: 13, 2003:109). He states that conspiracy theories have a social purpose. It is a way of making sense of events, crises, and happenings (Cubitt 1989: 13). Conspiracy theories, therefore, work as a tool to find the hidden truth in the presence of the unknown or reveal the *evil* to come up with a discerning explanation of a particular event. One can argue that conspiracy theories are narratives that present a very detailed explanation to reveal the hidden evil truth.

This brief definition by Cubitt and Barkun shows how conspiracy theories are widespread. Recent polls show that many people tend to believe in at least one conspiracy theory (Butter and Knight 2020: 1). It is possible to come across the term “conspiracy theory” daily, and people use it casually without thinking deeply into its meaning. In many countries, populist parties use conspiracies to strengthen their ideas or to present so-called evidence for their political agendas. These parties try to unfold the history by utilizing conspiratorial narratives (Mintz 1985). Rumors on the 2011 Arab uprising in the Middle East and disinformation factories that spread fake news in Russia are some examples (Butter and Knight 2019: 34).

There are two crucial points when it comes to talk about the characteristics of conspiracy theories. First, Butter stated that “not all fake news claims that a sinister plot is afoot. Moreover, the producers of fake news know that they are spreading lies.” (Butter 2020: 2). The purpose of fake news is to influence public opinion by creating stories. However, the nature of conspiracy theories is a bit different. Sometimes, conspirators believe what they argue (Knight 2000: 41). It is a crucial point that one should be careful of while examining conspiracy theories and conspiratorial narratives. It is possible to observe that some government officials and media channels utilize conspiracy theories on daily basis. For instance, the Turkish context of conspiracy narratives entrenched with national narrative. Therefore, it might be a challenge to categorize one speech by a government official as a conspiracy theory since, both the public and the official himself or herself most likely believes what they say (Gürpınar 2020a: 3).

Second, it is true, to some extent, that conspiracy theories have a pejorative meaning as Butter (2020) and Popper (1963) stated. Even today when someone uses the term conspiracy theory towards an idea, it seems that the idea is not true, and it is delusional. Therefore, it is significant to be careful while making a definition of conspiracy theory. It is true that they are not only *crazy* talks or delusional ideas. However, still, majority of people relates conspiracy theories with those ideas. Because this thesis uses commentaries and entries from the internet and categorizes them under the title of conspiracy theory, defining the concept beforehand is crucial to avoid pejorative connotations coming with the term as much as possible.

In the light of this purpose, there is one last thing to talk about regarding the definition of conspiracy theory. In fact, some conspiracies do happen. Daniel Pipes in his book *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* divided conspiracy theories into two types to avoid any confusion. He stated that there are “conspiracy theories, which exist only in the imagination” and there are “conspiracies, which are real” (Pipes 1997: 20). However, there are conspiracy theories that seemed as a product of imagination but ended up as real. Therefore, as I mentioned above, the etymology of the word theory is helping this work to define what conspiracy theory is. I mentioned that theory means a guess or suggestion. Moreover, it does not need any supporting or concrete evidence. So, when this thesis categorizes any comment or an idea as a conspiracy theory it indicates that the idea is not supported.

Consequently, throughout this work the term conspiracy theory is going to categorize narratives without any concrete proof. Naming a narrative as a conspiracy theory is not going to mean that it is false or true. In addition, the subchapter “History of the Research into Conspiracy Theories” will extend the definition by showing how conspiracy theory studies evolved from a paranoia-based concept towards a phenomenon where culture, society, politics, and economics plays a big role. This change of perspective in conspiracy theory studies is going to form this thesis’s stance on conspiracy theory.

What is a Conspiracy Belief?

In the book called *Conspiracy Theories and the Nordic Countries*, the term conspiracy belief is defined as follows: “A ‘conspiracy belief’ is, then, when an individual assumes that a conspiracy theory provides an acceptable approximation of explanation of particular events” (Astapova et al. 2020a: 5). It is possible to state that when a person or a group creates a conspiracy theory to explain the unknown, they do develop a conspiracy belief. Some scholars like Imhoff and Bruder (2014) used the term *conspiracy mentality* to define the belief. They also argued that conspiracy belief or mentality is a political reaction because people came up with conspiracy theories in order to explain the complexity of events they face (Astapova et al., 2020 a: 5- 6).

Michael Barkun defined the term conspiracy belief as “belief that an organization made up of individuals or groups was or is acting covertly to achieve some malevolent end” (2003: 3). In the piece titled *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe: Tropes and Trends*, it is possible to see how conspiracy belief narratives show up when there is something hidden (Astapova et al. 2020b). Therefore, it is possible to argue that when there is a lack of transparency and the presence of secrecy, conspiracy theories find themselves a suitable environment to appear.

Bartlett and Miller (2010) suggested in their work called *The Power of Unreason: Conspiracy Theories, Extremism and Counter-Terrorism* that conspiracy theories are highly related to the general crisis of trust in the government. They argue that when there is non-transparency, conspirators find themselves a suitable environment to come up with stories and narratives. This proposal is like what Barkun suggested on how conspiracy theories emerge when there is hidden information.

It will be plausible to state that conspiracy beliefs increase due to a lack of social trust towards the state or the government. West and Sanders (2003), in their work called *Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order* investigated the relationship between transparency and conspiracy. They argued that when the authorities enlighten things, it is possible to avoid conspiracies and the unknown (West & Sanders 2003: 220). Due to this observation, conspiracy beliefs appear when the authorities lack transparency and there are unknown or unexplained events and processes. This idea, however, is not absolute: countries known for high trust to the state are also susceptible to conspiracy theories (Astapova et al. 2020a). Acknowledging both concepts conspiracy theory and

conspiracy belief is significant for this work to show in what circumstances conspiratorial narratives appear.

These ideas, proposed by scholars, are visible for the Turkish context. Previous narratives related to nuclear folklore in Turkey show how politicians did not share every piece of information after the Chernobyl incident with the public. In fact, people and journalists learned what is going on from not domestic sources but via international sources. The impact of creating a secret environment back in the days will be observable when this work is going to focus on fieldwork material related to Akkuyu NPP. It will be possible to understand how these decisions made by the government and politicians back in the days created a powerful memory for the people who therefore lost their trust to official sources and now try to find a hidden agenda when it comes to a discussion on NPPs or any other political topic. This type of mindset automatically creates a perfect atmosphere for conspiracy theories to prosper around Akkuyu NPP.

History of the Research into the Conspiracy Theories

Andrew McKenzie-McHarg (2020), a researcher in medieval and modern studies, states that there is a spectrum of possible answers about the emergence of conspiracy theory. Studies show that ancient Greeks and ancient Romans had conspiracy theories within the social and political context (Zwierlein 2013: 68). Some scholars argue that conspiracy theories became a phenomenon in medieval times when accusations against Jews and Muslims emerged (McKenzie-McHarg 2020a: 18). German historian Cornel Zwierlein, on the other hand, defended the idea that conspiracy theories appeared in the early modern era in Italy (2013: 76). Karl Popper argued they are a product of the European Enlightenment (Popper 1963). Due to these contradictions, McKenzie-McHarg and Oberhauser (2020) state that instead of focusing on the starting point of conspiracy theories in history, it is more plausible to look for the development of the concept (18). Therefore, this subchapter discusses and presents the development of research into conspiracy theories from the perspectives of historical, cultural, and literary studies. Summarizing key contributions by scholars is going to help this work to find conspiratorial elements in fieldwork material.

Butter and Knight argue that historians started to analyze conspiracy theories in the 20th century (2020: 28). However, this initiation of academic focus was not on the favor of conspiracy theories and their impact throughout the history. In fact, earlier works “articulated conspiracist interpretations of history” (Butter and Knight 2020: 29). Scholars like Augustin Barruel, John Robinson and Johan August Stark wrote on the conspiracist side of the French Revolution in the 19th century. Those scholars believed in conspiracies and blamed secret groups like Illuminati and Freemasons (Butter and Knight 2020: 29). Horace Greeley and Henry Wilson presented conspiratorial explanations of the American Civil War (Richards 2000: 16). Butter states that these works show how it was normal to believe in conspiracy theories in 20th century Europe and the US (2014: 11).

Karl Popper is considered as the first scholar that treated conspiracy theories as a form of knowledge and not as a secret truth. He coined the term “conspiracy theory” in his work, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Popper 2020 [1945]). In addition, Theodor Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality* talked about the dangers of conspiracy theories and how they appear due to personal types of individuals (Butter 2020: 649). These two works, according to Butter (2020), opened the way for Richard Hofstadter’s 1965 essay called *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Hofstadter stated that conspiracy theories

are pathological, and they are a form of paranoia. Mark Fenster described Hofstadter's paranoid style of politics as "a pathology suffered by those existing outside of the pluralistic consensus who promoted fears of conspiracy" (2008: 24). Even though Hofstadter was not the first to criticize conspiracy theories, he was an influential figure in the field (Butter 2020: 29). He detected the element of paranoia in many newspaper articles, speeches of politicians, and manifestos of political parties in the US. Then, he connected this paranoia approach to some grand conspiratorial narratives like Illuminati, Masonry, and Jews. Hofstadter focused on how paranoia has a powerful influence on the people. His idea of the paranoid style was central to the research on conspiracy theories for decades. However, Butter argues that this dominant approach mislead scholars, and it is no longer a plausible way to explain what conspiracy theories are (2020: 6). First, considering conspiracy theories as pathological phenomenon categorizes conspiracy believers as individuals who suffer from mental health problems is problematic (Butter 2020: 64). The mental health in here is not a medical term but according to Hofstadter, only a minority group in the US believe in conspiracy theories which makes them different than, with his words, *normal* people. It is especially after 2000s that Hofstadter's influence on the field has decreased and cultural studies started to tackle his paranoid style of politics. As Butter (2020: 65) puts, conspiracy theories stopped being the study about the abnormal: instead, it became the study of normality.

What Hofstadter saw as paranoid style is a familiar concept for the Turkish government in some situations. Medeiros (2018) explores the paranoid style in the Turkish context and argues that there are many similarities. For example, conspiratorial accusations to gain populist support and using past traumas or paranoias is a common practice. It is possible to observe this practice in the post-Chernobyl discussion in Turkey. Therefore, this paper will analyze how these practices negatively affected the public's perspective towards the government in the following chapters. It is significant to note that conspiracy theories here caused a lack of trust, and as a result, more conspiracy theories appeared related to the Akkuyu NPP project.

When cultural studies started to examine conspiracy theories, efforts of understanding the impact of culture on conspiracy theories has increased. Scholars like Fenster (2008), Knight (2000), Jameson (1992), and Melley (2000) shifted the perspective from a pathological phenomenon on the public towards a cultural threat. Butter states that the approach of cultural studies is more realistic rather than symbolist (Butter 2020: 31-

32). The focus shifted towards collective narratives of people rather than individual level paranoias. However, this does not mean Hofstadter's theorization of conspiracy theories is completely wrong. Butter (2020) and Fenster (2008) state that his focus on psychological, cultural, and political aspects are still visible. The reason for that is because those elements might affect the conspiratorial mindset for people. In addition to that, the American centered perspective regarding conspiracy theories has changed as well. Hofstadter's examination of conspiracies as a phenomenon for the American studies are no longer accepted. This opens a way for making research on topics outside of the US like Turkey.

Literary studies, on the other hand, started to analyze works outside of the US and Europe. Butter states that they formed their analyses on three aspects: the narratology and content of conspiracy theories, focus on different genres and period in history, and the impact of ideology on conspiracist narratives (Butter 2020: 35). Studies were mostly focusing on the American context; however, recently published works started to break this trend (Butter 2020: 8).

Folklore, Conspiracy Theories, and Nuclear Power

Eda Kalmre (2013), in her work titled *The Human Sausage Factory. A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu* stated that folklorists had studied rumors and most rumors appear when there is a crisis and lack of reliable information. Rumors spread via oral transmissions, letters, diary entries, and other personal testimonies. Besides, it is possible to conduct interviews with people to gather conspiratorial narratives and rumors. This work is based on the collection of narratives from the internet.

Alan Dundes (1965) defined folklore as “any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor” (2). He gave examples of families, localities, ethnic and religious groups, hobbyists, and occupational groups. Russel Frank (2011), in his work *Newslore: Contemporary Folklore on the Internet*, states that in addition to Dundes’s definition, it is possible to argue that if members of a group interact and share something, it is possible to define those communicative narratives as folklore. Two persons are thus enough to spread folk narratives, including rumours and conspiracy theories.

Moreover, Dundes also focused on volumes of hand drawn cartoons, parody memos and written jokes circulated within offices. Even though those materials are printed and there is no oral transaction, Dundes categorized those narratives as a part of urban folklore. Therefore, we can assume that folklore is not only related to oral narratives (Dundes 1965). This idea opens the way for this thesis work to make an investigation on internet groups. In his work *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, Dundes talks about folklore as something alive and dynamic rather than dead and static. Historically, the perspective towards folklore has developed and changed. Dundes and Pagter (1975) published a collection of folklore narratives and accepted printed sources as a part of folk culture. He stated that the internet helped folk narratives to transmit within groups and between individuals faster (Dundes 1965).

Internet folklore or netlore, then, is not orally transmitted. In addition, it is not a face-to-face type of communication. However, it is folklore since it is shared in internet groups. As it is mentioned, this paper is going to utilize folklore narratives on the Internet related to Akkuyu NPP. Therefore, there is a need for discussing the narratives related to nuclear power and nuclear power plants. The brief historical presentation that I am going to make will help us to understand how conspiratorial folk narratives find themselves a

place among scholars.

Folklorists started to focus on narratives about nuclear power especially after the Chernobyl disaster that occurred in April 1986. In her analysis, Larisa Fialkova, a researcher in folklore studies, points out that the term Chernobyl folklore does not only include the local (Chernobyl) narratives but it turned into something global. These global narratives implicate jokes, posts on media channels, TV programs from all over the world related to Chernobyl. Folklore about the incident in Chernobyl also prospered and numerous genres appeared like rumors, jokes, songs, personal stories, and conspiracy theories (Fialkova, 2001).

On the other hand, Chernobyl conspiracy theories and folklore are not unique: quite the contrary they have similar repertoires of other conspiracy theories. Concepts like foreign influence, secrecy, external forces, and plotting can be found in most conspiracy narratives like 9/11, anti-vaccination, USA elections in 2016 (Astapova 2020: 395). These narratives related to Chernobyl folklore is continuing and visible on social media, TV shows, popular culture, and tourism. Also, these narratives appear on discussions about other NPPs around the globe like Akkuyu in Turkey.

History of the Research into Turkey as a Conspiracy Nation

This sub-chapter shows the historical development of conspiratorial narratives in Turkey. The Turkish conspiratorial environment, like some other national narratives, can be grounded in history and political culture. It is possible to observe that the national narrative has a huge impact on conspiratorial setting for Turkey. In addition, past historical traumas related to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire caused the creation of paranoia as a state culture and therefore, conspiracy theories are not only visible from people's side, but governments create conspiracy theories as well. To explain this idea, below I present five main Turkish historically developed conspiracy theories.

Paranoia from the Past: The Ottoman Impact

This nationalist metanarrative became visible with the *Young Turks*, a coalition of reform groups that organized a revolutionary movement against the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II which ended up with establishing a constitutional government. During their period in the 20th century, they promoted a new way of Turkish nationalism within the empire, and it was built on the idea that the domestic and international enemies of the Ottoman Empire are trying to destroy the empire itself (Medeiros 2018: Gürpınar 2020a: Gürpınar and Nefes: 2020). These enemies have historically been either the West or Russia. The mindset of Young Turks was to blame the external forces for every obstacle that the empire faces, including the failure of the state itself. The conspiratorial narrative they utilized was about an external force that steers and plots against the empire (Gürpınar and Nefes: 611). This *governmental* mindset is significant in terms of understanding the roots of the conspiratorial culture that today's Turkey has, as Gürpınar (2020a: 3) stated. When we investigate the republic's political history, it is possible to see that the narrative of blaming the *other* as the enemy is a common practice. This understanding is not unique for Turkey. In fact, it is possible to find them in other countries (Butter 2014). However, for Turkey, Gürpınar connects this conspiratorial narrative promoted by the government as an idea developed during the Ottoman Empire, more specifically during the 18th century where the empire started to lose its power and influence (2020: 6).

Sevres Syndrome

World War I was devastating for the Ottomans: they lost the war, its territories, and the state itself was in the verge of collapse. In 1920, *Treaty of Sevres* was signed between the victorious forces and the Ottoman empire requiring the Ottomans to dissolve their army. Moreover, it partitioned the Empire to Greece, Kurds, Armenia, Britain, France, and Italy. This treaty was renegotiated after Mustafa Kemal's (Atatürk) military success against the forces that operated Asia Minor Campaign (Turkish Independence War). This event led two parties to sign *Lausanne Treaty* called in 1923. As scholars argued, these chains of events caused *Sevres Syndrome* or *Sevrepheobia* for the Turkish society and politicians (Kuzmanovic 2012: Hale 2012 and Kieser 2006). It is a belief that some outside forces like the West are conspiring to destroy the country. This belief is still popular among the people, politicians and therefore, creates a basis for Turkish political conspiracy theories (Guida 2008: 37).

In 2007, Turkish school teachers' union conducted an opinion poll which showed that "In Turkey, the perceptions of threat have different aspects and are one of the most important elements for political choices" (Guida 2008 :37). Another survey by the national TV channel TRT titled *Turkish Support for the EU is Diminishing* shows that 72 percent of the Turkish citizens believe that there are countries aiming to divide the country (Guida 2008: 38). Guida (2008) argues that this type of conspiracy belief is a widespread perspective among the Turkish intellectuals, people, and politicians. For Turkey, The Sevres Syndrome and conspiracy theories compromise the understanding of reality and re-directs country's political culture in a way where politicians use the concept of fear and paranoia to get mass support (Guida 2008: 50). This political opportunism, as Guida mentions, is visible in both Islamist and secular Kemalist segments of the society (Guida 2008: 42). The historical experience of the Ottoman Empire facing a collapse because of Sevres Agreement, implemented by Western countries, created a paranoid atmosphere for the country. This paranoia, on the other hand, appears on media and speeches of politicians (Guida 2008). Given the fact that paranoia and Sevrepheobia are inseparable concepts from the Turkish political culture and society, it is possible to observe the impact of these concepts for the Akkuyu NPP related posts.

The Kemalist Narrative

Gürpınar stated that the Kemalist narrative is a blend of nationalism and modernization harmonized with past experiences that Ottomans faced (2020: 4). This narrative evolved throughout the history of the republic, but the core idea is separating the modern Turkish Republic from the Ottoman predecessor by accepting modernization, nationalism, democracy, and secularism. Therefore, any idea that is against these values can be considered something imposed by the enemy or the other. Throughout the history of the republic, the supposed opposing entities blamed as groups backed by external forces were seen as aiming to stop the country from modernization. It is possible to state that both Ottoman paranoia and Sevres Syndrome has the same conspiratorial structure with the Kemalist narrative according to which the state utilizes the idea of external threat or secret plotting against the country to strengthen its own political power.

The Islamist Counternarrative and Conspiracy Theories

The Islamist counternarrative assumes that the process of Westernization is a conspiracy and a plot that aims to destroy Turkish values, morals, and national past (Medeiros 2018). It appeared in the 1910s but became more popular especially after the 1950s. This idea denies intellectualism and its perceptions and tags intellectuals as brainwashed entities. Again, the core of the political culture of this way of thinking is the same: there is always an enemy that aims to destroy the country. Turkish conservative perspective of anti-intellectualism is a common pattern. Richard Hofstadter approached this perspective in his works *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* and *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. For Hofstadter, anti-intellectualism is about “resentment of the life of the mind, and those who are considered to represent it: and a disposition to constantly minimize the value of that life.” (1963: 7). Gürpınar, in his work *Intellectuals, White Turks, and the Sons of the Soil: Intellectuality in Turkish Conservative Thought* stated that this anti-intellectual movement by the conservatives is about blaming *Kemalist* intelligentsia for defending ideas like secularism and modernity. Since the Kemalist-nationalist understanding was a blend of nationalism and modernity, the Islamist counter narrative aims to create its own alternative intelligentsia (Gürpınar 2020a: 4). This intelligentsia, according to the counter Islamist perception, denies the Western modernization and focuses on building a nationally minded intellectual base as an alternative (Gürpınar 2020a: 10). Therefore, it is possible to find conspiracy theories that

blame the opponent, in this case Kemalists, of various cases of political, social, and cultural conspiracies including the Akkuyu NPP project. Even though past experiences like treaties are concrete examples that show how there were attempts by international powers to somewhat hurt the empire or the state, it is important to understand that this history is used by politicians as a tool to strengthen their own political views or policies.

The Concept of Post-Truth in Turkey

The Oxford dictionary selected *post-truth* as the word of the year in 2016. It is defined as denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than the appeals to emotion and personal belief. The term post-truth found a place on the stage for itself after Donald Trump came to power in 2016. The idea of post-truth is a part of political culture and the era after 2016 is regarded as the age of post-truth politics by scholars since many countries started to re-shape their political agendas by addressing emotions rather than focusing on facts (Alcorn 2017).

Even though it is a new term, the works of well-known philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber considered as predecessors of this theory (Heit 2018). Heit (2018) pointed out that in Nietzsche's piece called *Truth and Lying in a Nonmoral Sense* argued that humans create their own truth. Nietzsche basically said: "If someone hides an object behind a bush, then seeks and finds it there, that seeking, and finding is not very laudable: but that is the way it is with the seeking and finding of truth within the rational sphere" (1873: 251). In the light of this definition, it is plausible to say that post-truth politics are about using subjective arguments to legitimize each decision rather than presenting objective facts.

Max Weber (1917), in his article called *Science as Vocation*, argues that facts are objective, while values can change because of culture and religion. Therefore, it is hard to know the truth, but people shape it (Heit 2018). For Nietzsche, Weber's understanding of truth in social sciences is subjective so it suggests people create their own truths. This way the core of post-truth political culture is constructed.

Julian De Medeiros (2018) was the first scholar who explored the relationship between post-truth and conspiracy theories in Turkey. For him, it was not a novel idea, he stated that scholars simply did not focus on this concept before. This does not mean that the idea of not using objective facts but creating emotional stories to influence the public opinion was not a thing until the Akkuyu NPP project. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, Turkey has a history of paranoid style narratives and conspiracy theories. All different narratives have a common point where each narrative creates an enemy. This enemy is presented in different forms and appearances but always targets the public opinion and forms upon an emotional origin story. Narratives that this thesis presented

before, like Kemalist, Ottoman and Islamist, formed a common enemy to influence the public rather than focusing on facts. However, the tricky part is that these formed conspiratorial narratives do not mean that they are not true. In fact, some of them have a kernel of truth. The problem that I am trying to clarify in here is that both the politicians and the public do not focus on the truth but use those *enemy* narratives to gain more populist support.

Lee McIntyre (2018) suggests that post-truth belongs to power holders. It does not focus on evidence but aims to influence masses. For nuclear folklore related events in Turkey, it is possible to state that post-truth politics was visible in the post-Chernobyl environment. Politicians publicly spoke about how reports coming from the West aimed to damage the economy and integrity of the country which is an outstanding example of post-truth political culture. Politicians or power holders abused actual evidence and concentrated on topics that people have emotional attachments like the nation itself.

This political culture was visible since the Ottoman days, as I mentioned earlier. It is related to paranoia politics, enemy narratives, and conspiracy theories. Previous parts showed how these theories and concepts intertwined together from early days of the republic. For Akkuyu NPP, it will be visible that these types of incidents in the past have a tremendous impact on people's conspiratorial way of thinking now.

2: Methodology

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework for the study of conspiracy theories and the internet research. The first subchapter covers the conspiracy theories and their position in the internet environment. The second subchapter covers the concept of netnography as a method of doing internet fieldwork. It helps me to investigate the reasons behind some conspiracy narratives that I found in the online environment and to analyse them through the perspective of political culture.

Conspiracy Theory and the Internet

Semiotician Simona Stano (2020) pointed out in her piece *The Internet and The Spread of Conspiracy Theories* that contemporary media created a suitable environment for conspiracy theories to appear. Contemporary internet forums, blogs, applications, and social network pages offer an opportunity for people to share their ideas and thoughts on any topic. Moreover, in contemporary new media channels people do not only share their opinions but interact with each other. It is possible to re-share, react or comment on any type of post online these days (Stano 2020: 483). In her work *Fragmented Future* Darcy DiNucci (1999), an expert in user experience, defined this phenomenon as *Web 2.0*. Different from *Web 1.0*, internet culture became highly participatory, and each user plays an active role rather than staying passive and just browsing online contents. This development in online media changed the communication practices. Not only people started to share their ideas but disinformative or misinformative contents started to appear more and more (Stano 2020: 484). Misinformation as a concept existed before the internet era; however, the internet provides a fertile ground for those narratives to appear (Stano 2020: 484).

Stef Aupers, professor of media culture, argues that scholars were looking for conspiracy theories in fiction, novels, series, art, propaganda, and movies. However, it is possible to detect, decode or encode conspiratorial narratives in everyday life (Aupers 2020: 469). Highly participatory, the internet offers a great opportunity for researchers to find everyday conspiracy theories. This subchapter, therefore, is going to tackle the question: How to detect conspiracy theory on the internet? Aupers (2020) states that Stuart Hall's 1980 work on encoding and decoding models is still highly helpful for this. Hall identified three perspectives on media reading: the "preferred reading" where text

producer wants the audience to view the media text as it is. The “dominant-hegemonic reading” is where the consumer or reader takes the information as it is in a passive way. Finally, the “oppositional reading” is where consumers criticize and resist what is given to them (Aupers 2020: 472). This is the initial point that conspiracy culture becomes visible on mass media and the internet. People do not just read and believe what they read but they criticize and look for a hidden meaning in texts. They decode messages on social platforms and encode their own theories due to their personal beliefs and identity (Stano 2020: 473-474).

Mass media and the internet has a significant role in terms of formulating conspiracy theories in contemporary society about the state, government, ideologies, and happenings (Aupers 2020: 469). From the perception of conspiracy theorists mass media materials are suspicious and hiding the reality (Barkun 2003). Therefore, observing Hall’s oppositional reading related to Akkuyu NPP online posts is going to help this thesis detect conspiracy narratives.

Netnography as a Research Methodology

According to Robert V. Kozinets (2018), a globally recognized expert on social media and the one who coined the term *netnography*, netnography is a participant-observational research that is done in an online environment. A *netnographer* starts his or her fieldwork from a general observation to a deeper examination. The process is like what ethnographers do, where the researcher collects notes from the field and tries to connect them to the research question. Kozinets pointed that netnography is different, in terms of form, from digital anthropology. The difference is about the way of doing the research, as in netnography the researchers conduct an online participant observation to gather data. In digital anthropology, researchers do fieldwork with a specifically recruited group by asking questions. The problem of digital anthropology, according to Kozinets, is the fact that researchers limit themselves with what the respondents share with them. However, this does not mean netnography and digital anthropology are not connected or are completely different from each other. In fact, their way of analysing the data is similar (Kozinets 2018: 54). The world is becoming digitalized every day, and it became the new normal where everyone has a social media account. People share their ideas on various topics and there are social media networks for it like Twitter, blogs, Facebook, etc. This subchapter is going to explore why netnography was chosen as the primary methodology to gather data for this research.

The field of netnography found its roots in marketing and consumer research. However, ethnographers used this methodology and started to follow communities into the online space (Beaulieu 2004: Garcia, Standlee, Beckhoff and Cui 2009). Bridges states that:

While the divide between online social life and face-to-face communication was previously thought to be significant, many now recognise that the two worlds have blended into one and this hybrid world includes the use of technology to communicate, to commune, to socialise, to express, and to understand. (2006:2)

The traditional perspective on community explained as “an essential and generic human bond, without which there would be no society” (Turner 1969: 97). However, Kozinets (2018) elaborates on this idea and argues that internet pages and groups can also be communities. This contemporary approach constructed the basic understanding about netnography as a way of data analysis. The significant point of Kozinets (2018) is about the definition of contemporary communities where people gather in online environments according to their shared interests. This idea fits well with Dundes’s definition on folklore. Dundes suggested that anything can be a part of folklore where at least two individuals are sharing the same interest. Internet forums and groups are interesting cases of such. For this thesis, I chose netnography as my core way of data gathering. The reason is that as most of contemporary countries Turkish society uses social media a lot. According to the results, the duration of internet usage per person and the time spent on social media in Turkey is quite high compared to average. Users between the ages of 16-64 have an average of 7 hours 29 minutes using the internet on daily basis in Turkey. During this period, the active use of social media is 81% (Hürriyet 2020). For 2020, “We are Social”, a global internet platform research company, published a report for Turkey showing that total number of 63 million people out of 90 million population spend their time on Internet daily (Hürriyet 2020). In other words, Turkish society is familiar with online environment and therefore, it is possible to gather enough data to conduct research on conspiracy theory narratives related to Akkuyu NPP.

For gathering data, I investigated two groups because there are some differences. One group is geographically located for people who live in the region where they are building the nuclear power plant. There are 2100 members. The second group accepts people who live in the region, so it is broader in terms of participant range. There are 1600 members in total. It is significant to note that the ones live near by the NPP construction can join to the second groups as well. I decided to use forums and topics related to Akkuyu NPP. This work conducted the *netnographic* fieldwork in two closed Facebook groups and one forum. Two Facebook groups are for locals who live very close to where the state is constructing the nuclear power plant. The purpose of using these two groups for the fieldwork is not only about having discussions on nuclear power plant. However, it is possible to observe that whenever there is an event on news about nuclear power plants, someone posts an entry. Then, people share their ideas and thoughts under the comments section. These two groups are suitable to conduct an internet participant

observation because it is possible to see how locals think or react to every decision that the government made.

The third focus group is from a nationwide blog where people who have accounts can start discussion under any topic and write entries. Their opinions and comments are in chronological order. The blog is popular among Turkish people. Until 2013, the website *Ekşi Sözlük* was sharing the total number of users, entries, and authors daily (Sine and Özsoy 2017). However, when they introduced the new interface for the website, this information was no longer active for users. Still, Sine and Özsoy (2017) argue that the number has skyrocketed in recent years. I mention the average time spent on above with seven and a half hours. These numbers also mean that a netnographic research methodology will be suitable for this research.

In addition, nuclear power plant related narratives do not appear only because a local news agency makes a story about it. When global news and narratives appear like Fukushima in Japan or HBO's show about Chernobyl, people remember what is going on with the Akkuyu NPP. Even though most narratives about nuclear folklore are not related to Akkuyu NPP, internet environment provides information on the global level and people can find a connection with their own case.

I started my fieldwork in May 2020 by surfing on internet, trying to find community groups related to my topic. The process was tricky because there are many groups on the internet related to Akkuyu NPP but most of them were not active or functioning. However, one day I came across a post on Facebook about Akkuyu NPP in one group that I was part of it. I decided to use the keyword "Akkuyu" to search whether there are more comments and posts related to my topic. The result was quite satisfactory, and I found a wide range of discussions and posts from 2014 to today. Afterwards, I started to read articles and books on conducting an internet research. With Kozniet's (2018) book on netnography being the most influential for me. The book was so interesting, and it taught me a lot on conducting a netnographic fieldwork. I noticed that netnographers join online groups and observe what people share about a specific topic. Therefore, I decided to limit my fieldwork with two local Facebook groups that I already signed up for. I included the third focus group, *Ekşi Sözlük*, on August 2020 since it was one of the biggest and most popular forums in Turkey.

For data collection process, I spent roughly 120 hours at the computer. I gathered comments and posts that can be related to my topic of choice by taking screenshots. I collected each post in chronological order first. Categorizing each post and comment chronologically had an advance for my fieldwork and thesis because I observed that people tend to share their opinions on Akkuyu NPP when there is a news coverage about the power plant itself or when a catastrophic event happens related to nuclear power plants like Fukushima incident. I read and collected every data possible from the three focus groups that I decided to conduct a research. At the end, there was more than enough material for me to analyse and therefore, I decided to filter each comment since some posts and comments were similar in terms of idea and structure to the others. Observing around 1500 comments and posts was extremely useful when it comes to detecting the main themes and generalize each conspiratorial narrative. I successfully managed to pick some comments and posts that can be useful for me to show the themes that I am searching for this thesis and after spending hours and days, I successfully completed my fieldwork. However, it is significant to note that since Akkuyu NPP is an ongoing project, it is possible to find new posts and comments in these groups and therefore, I regularly check those groups to find a new entry that can be useful for my thesis work.

One of the hardest challenges that I faced throughout my fieldwork was about being ethically careful. It is crucial to protect people who shared their ideas on the internet and their identity. The reason is that the participant observation variant of netnography suggests researchers to join the forums and groups. There are two ways to conduct research in an online forum. The first one is where the researchers get permission from the admin and post a questionnaire for people to answer. This way of gathering data highly depends on people's attitude towards the researcher. Kozinets showed that usually people have this negative attitude towards the researcher because they feel they are under observation by someone all the time (2018: 62).

The second way, which I chose for this work, is about observing comments, posts and discussions. Since every entry is in Turkish language, translation of these posts helped me to protect anonymity. For Facebook groups, I do not share any names and people who shared their ideas in this research. For Ekşi Sözlük, it is only possible to see the usernames of people who post on the forum. So, it was easier to keep anonymity. This methodology opened a way for me to be respectful towards the focus group. Revealing the identities of informants, any other confidential information about them, information that could lead to their identification, would lead to an ethical conflict. That is why I kept every informant's information safe and anonymous.

3: Fieldwork Analysis and Results

Chernobyl Trauma on Turkey

This chapter provides an analysis of fieldwork materials. This work categorizes each post and comment under three main titles, which are conspiracy theories related to paranoia politics, enemy targeted conspiracies, and narratives where lack of trust towards the government is visible. In the light of this categorization, it will be possible to see and understand how people created and use conspiracy theories to strengthen their points of views. It is important to remind that categorizing a comment as a conspiracy theory does not mean that idea is true or false. It means somebody thought and came up with an idea because he or she faced some difficulties when it comes to find an explanation about the Akkuyu NPP project. Plus, whenever comments and entries were referring to an incident or something that happened in the past, this work will try to present the connection of these past events with Akkuyu NPP. Mentioning events that shaped the conspiracy theories on Akkuyu NPP are valuable since chronologically each event opened new narratives and theories on the discussion. This way of doing an analysis is going to help the reader to understand what is going on in nuclear folklore related narratives for the Turkish context. To achieve that, additional materials besides field-notes and findings will be useful. For instance, for a comment that refers to a caricature or a newspaper headline, I comment on the source of it as well. Sharing that additional information is useful from the perspective of folklore because folklore is a concept that connects people via any means. That includes jokes, caricatures, visuals, legends, conspiracy theories and stories. Therefore, only focusing on conspiracy theories is going to narrow the concept of folklore and theories related to conspiracies.

Remembering the Past: The Impact of Chernobyl

The disaster happened in the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, in the city of Pripyat on April 26, 1986. Pripyat was on the northern side of the Ukrainian SSR. The impact of the disaster was so powerful that many countries saw the negative outcomes, especially in Europe and the Middle East. Because of its coastal border to the Black Sea, Turkey faced the consequences of the explosion. Turkey learned what happened in Pripyat after four days on the 30th of April. *Hürriyet* newspaper headline (cf. Figure 2) claimed that radioactive clouds are extremely deadly (“Tepemizde Ölüm Bulutu Dolaşiyor Nükleer Alarm”, 1986). On the following days, the radiation amount in the northern side of the country increased to 16 milliroentgen per hour, which was the highest value the country has ever faced (Palabıyık et al. 2010). In a press conference about the explosion, prime minister Turgut Özal answered the questions regarding the possible threat from Chernobyl with these words: “Hey brother, technicians know this job. Why are you asking me? Radiation’s effect decreases as it spreads.” (“Zirveden Radyasyon Şakası” 1986) (cf. Figure 3).

The biggest dispute was about whether the agricultural products that grow in the Northern–Black Sea Region of Turkey had been contaminated or not. On 2 December 1986, headlines of *Günaydın* were about the radiation levels in the northern side of the country. They reported that tea exportation to Europe had stopped because of West’s radiation conspiracies to harm the state by any means. *Günaydın* stated that the Western reports showed that tea coming from Turkey was highly radioactive (“Türkiye için tehlike yok”, 1986). However, on the 6th of December, 1986 (cf. Figure 4) President Kenan Evren’s statement was totally against the decision. He said, “Radiation or mediation, what do you call. Nothing will happen to Turks.” Also, again, prime minister Özal said that “A little of radioactive tea is good for health. You can drink without being scared it tastes better” (“Zirveden Radyasyon Şakası” 1986). Politicians showed Turkish Atomic Energy Authority’s (TAEA) report as a concrete evidence that the tea coming from the north was clean and healthy (Palabıyık et al. 2010).

The minister of industry and commerce drank tea (cf. Figure 5) in front of journalists to show that it is safe to consume (“Çaycı Bakan”, 1986). Also, in another speech he said, “People who say Turkey has radiation are atheists.” (“Türkiye’de radyasyon var diyenler dinsizdir 1986) (cf. Figure 6). However, Battelle Institute in Germany prepared a report after examining 13 different tea types. In March 1986, the head of TEAE (Turkish Atomic Energy Authority) Özemre confessed that he did not want to drive people into panic. Besides this statement, one scientist who signed the report written by TAEA said that The Council of Higher Education hid the reality from the people (Palabıyık et al. 2010). Palabıyık, Yavaş and Aydın (2010) suggested it was to create an enemy to hide or avoid negative outcomes. A contamination on the northern coast of the country could damage agricultural products and the economy. Therefore, the government named every report that was against their own interests as conspiracy theories.

Chernobyl experience Turkey lived through formed memory for the people. Since politicians created an enemy and accused them of spreading conspiracy theories, it is possible to observe how politicians promote paranoia to the people. The way of blaming the reports that came from the West and talking about them as conspiracy theories that aims to damage the country is like what Hofstadter (1963) stated in his piece. Paranoid style as a pejorative concept was not only visible for Chernobyl disaster in the Turkish nuclear folklore narratives. It also appeared in narratives related to Akkuyu NPP because people recalled the past behaviours of the state, which ended up with losing trust towards the government. Therefore, not only politicians used these conspiratorial narratives like *creating an enemy of the state* but people came up with conspiracy theories to criticize or support the government’s decision on constructing Turkey’s first ever NPP.

Analysis of Entries in Ekşi Sözlük

Ekşi Sözlük, is a collaborative hypertext dictionary that is building up on user contribution. The structure is like crowdsourcing. It is not a dictionary in a strict sense: because it does not require for users to write correct information. On Ekşi Sözlük, the very first entry is dating back to 2003 under the headline Akkuyu NPP. Someone, who is anonymous, wrote the first entry as follows “*A power plant located in Mersin Büyükeceli town, the municipality has stopped the construction after many years of discussions and actions*”. Technically, someone posted this entry after reading a newspaper article about Akkuyu NPP. This way of behaviour is common in other entries and posts as well where people remember to discuss Akkuyu NPP if they see something about it on the internet, newspapers, or TV. There is no need to search for a conspiratorial meaning for this particular post. However, observing the initial point of internet narratives is helpful for me to understand the mindset of the community.

After this very first comment, only four other “descriptive” entries are visible in this forum before 2008. On 26th of April 2008, some people held a protest in Istanbul against nuclear power and people shared their ideas under the title. One person wrote a descriptive text about Akkuyu NPP and put a reference link to his comment, which is a common tradition on Ekşi Sözlük. It is like putting reference points in a dictionary to enhance the definition. So, this time the author put a reference point under his comment for the headline about the 2008 protest. That comment was five paragraphs long, and the author critically expressed his or her ideas on Akkuyu NPP. Here, it is possible to see a small part from the entry.

*...We did not forget the Chernobyl disaster, we did not forget that tens of thousands of people died of cancer, only half of Italy was polluted. 400 thousand people were displaced. We have not forgotten ... those who stood in front of the public saying “a little bit of radiation is good”, those who tried to hide the effects of Chernobyl, those who drank tea on the screen and later died of cancer, and handfuls of hazelnuts distributed to children in schools. And of course, we have not forgotten the Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the fat man * and the little boy * ... because we know that nuclear power plant also means nuclear weapons.*

This comment is interesting to analyse because it reflects both Hofstadter's idea on paranoid style politics and Popper's idea on conspiracy theories and general crisis of transparency. The author mentioned past events related to nuclear power plants and power around the world. In addition, he or she remembered the aftermath of Chernobyl incident for the Turkish state. There is a reference about what politicians did for the Turkish context. Creating a connection between this past incident and memory with other global nuclear related disasters fits to the conspiratorial context. Lack of transparency pushed this author to make connections between all the nuclear folklore related events that happened back in the days with the Akkuyu NPP. The last statement "we know that nuclear power plant also means nuclear weapons" is a conspiracy theory that formalized by the author. This conspiratorial idea cannot be proven because there is not any information whether the project, Akkuyu NPP, is only for developing nuclear weapons. However, based on the past events and suspicious environment that government created, the author came up with an argument where this project will end up disastrously.

Here is another example after news spread across the country on Russia and Turkey's deal on Akkuyu NPP. Someone shared this comment on 12th of June 2010 in Ekşi Sözlük. The comment follows:

I guess there is nobody in the "dictionary" who defends nuclear energy more than I do. However, the government officially messed up with it. He gave this power plant to Russia without a tender, behind closed doors, at a very high price with secret negotiations. Under the construction of this power plant, there is a desire to improve its own wealth rather than energy policy. In return for this power plant, which was given to Russia without a tender and at exorbitant prices, Russia will supply oil to the Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline, which the AKP has awarded without a tender to the Ç... group. Ç... Group will both construct the pipeline and establish a refinery in Ceyhan.

Therefore, this is not a nuclear energy project, but a project of creating your own wealth.

The conspiratorial style is visible from the first sight. The statement about "secret negotiations" shows the lack of trust towards the government. This mindset targeted government and pro-government entities. It created a conspiracy theory that suggests these entities are building the power plant just for becoming richer and richer. The author accused Turkish government by making agreements "behind closed doors". Again,

Butter's (2020) and Gürpınar's (2020a) arguments on the concept of secrecy and conspiracy theories are visible in this short analysis by one citizen. As I mentioned before, lack of transparency creates a suitable environment for people to fill those gaps with conspiratorial narratives and ideas. It might be hard to state that this author's argument is completely inaccurate or true without proving it with an evidence. However, his or her wording choices like "awarded" are highly conspiratorial and shows the agreement between the state and the contractor company as not an ordinary decision but something that aims to harm the country or politics.

So far, this comment has elements from paranoid style of politics and lack of trust towards the government. Besides that, it is possible to see the impact of post-truth political culture. Scholars like Keyes (2004) and Heit (2018) argued that Nietzsche's and Weber's idea on post-truth shows that there is no truth, and it is a matter of interpretation in social sciences. Plus, as this thesis discussed before, post-truth politics is about creating a truth based on emotions, not facts. In this comment, the author mentioned about how politicians, back in the days, drank tea in front of the public to deceive people on emotional level. It is a splendid example of post-truth political culture and it creates a lack of trust towards the government.

Until 11th of March 2011, there were only 34 entries under the title Akkuyu NPP. So, between 2003 and 2011, it is hard to observe a lot of discussions regarding the power plant. There are few reasons regarding this outcome. First, the agreement between Russia and Turkey was signed in 2010, but the construction initiation ceremony happened in 2015. Therefore, people were not sure whether the project will start or not. This affected people's response towards Akkuyu NPP, and they did not share their opinions a lot on the country wide blog. Only after protests, like the one in 2008, a discussion started. The second reason is about the lack of media visibility. There were few articles regarding Akkuyu NPP before 2011 because it was just a project. There was nothing solid about it. However, on 11 March 2011, an earthquake happened in Fukushima, Japan. The result was catastrophic because the earthquake and tsunami hit the country and caused damage in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Okuma region. The disaster in Fukushima NPP classified as Level 7 out of 7 on the "International Nuclear Event Scale". It has the same danger level with the Chernobyl incident (Mc Curry 2021: 866).

This new accident in Japan started a huge discussion under the title and authors wrote approximately 90 entries just under the title Akkuyu NPP. There were more comments on a new title called “Fukushima Disaster” since the incident was not about Akkuyu NPP. When something related to nuclear power occurs anywhere around the world, people tend to take that happenings personally. They make empathy for their own local context (Fialkova 2001). This behaviour is understandable because the nature of nuclear folklore is not only limited with local indicators but is highly global with perspective and debates on it are showing parallels (Fialkova 2001).

Number of entries increased drastically after Fukushima incident, which proves Fialkova’s (2001) point that nuclear folklore is a global phenomenon. Entries, after Fukushima, have a common and interesting pattern. People talked not only about the dangers of nuclear power plants but compared Japan and Turkey from various aspects. Most comments categorized Japan as a developed country where they have experience in engineering. On the other hand, they argued Turkey is far behind Japan in terms of economic and scientific capabilities. Therefore, most comments were not constructive towards Akkuyu NPP. Here is a post from 2011, March:

The three-storey building cannot survive in an earthquake in my beautiful country, that is as big as the aftershocks in Japan, makes one wonder under what conditions, how this power plant will be made. We do not even know if we are capable to build a power plant. While trying to plan this power plant, did you think of benefits and disadvantages? You cannot manage a power plant like a municipality, you need to establish carefully selected expert staff and pay their salaries as they deserve, you know, right? Why am I telling because more than 60% of Istanbul, which is rotten and ready to collapse with the logic of nothing will happen to us, has not been properly renovated and consolidated since 1999, and while not a single step has been taken in this regard other than compulsory earthquake insurances, how is this great responsibility of an understanding in this mentality that dominates the country in general. Citizens are pushed into suspicion by insisting on the construction of a power plant in an unsuitable place, such as the Akkuyu. Also, if the issue is something that cannot be removed when its excavation is captured, such as a nuclear power plant ... The fact that Russia has agreed for this business is a good development, fortunately. God knows, I did not wait for this task to be given to government construction company TOKI.

This entry starts with a comparison between Turkey and Japan. It states that Japan is successful to deal with natural disasters like earthquakes. However, the author says Turkey cannot deal with the consequences of any earthquake. His statement on building a nuclear power plant in Turkey, “We do not even know if we are capable to build a power plant” shows how this person does not trust to the state. The wording he or she chose like building the NPP like a “municipality” and “paying salaries that specialists deserve” is interesting in a way where it is noticeable how experiences damaged the perspective of trusts towards the government. The author gives a reference to 1999 earthquake and unplanned urbanization in Istanbul in order to prove his or her lack of trust. There are conspiratorial narratives in this text, but they mostly relate to the concept of trust. These conspiracy theories are not talking about a secret agenda of a specific group that is planning to harm the construction process, but the lack of transparency caused by previous events led people to think in a way that Akkuyu NPP project will end up in a disastrous way.

From a different point of view, this entry shows how the Turkish society, as a part of nuclear folklore narratives is influenced by past events like Chernobyl, Fukushima. They connected an incident that happened far away, in this case it is Japan, to their home country. This behaviour shows the essence of nuclear folklore and how global it can be.

In addition, people did not limit themselves with the incident but compared two countries, Japan, and Turkey, in terms of trust towards the government. The result ended up with more suspicion towards the Akkuyu NPP. Therefore, the author’s analysis ends with questioning the construction location and whether or not it is suitable. The author also mentioned that he or she is happy with government’s decision of giving construction rights to Russia instead of building it on their own. This comment shows how the lack of trust is on a serious level in the Turkish context.

After the incident in Fukushima, one person shared a comment like this:

I think this plant should be built. Then it will explode, (We are building it what do you expect? Even if the engineer is a foreigner, the operator is Turkish, the tenderer is Turkish) or when it explodes, we will face the environment in ‘S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow of Chernobyl’ environment, a set, and that’s when the super tourism revenue will come. I believe that our government has made these plans. He thinks of us.

This example combined a humorous approach with conspiracy theories. The author shows mistrust towards the government by underlining that the operator is a local authority. Then he or she made a humorous/conspiratorial statement about the aftermath of a possible, planned according to the author, explosion. There is also a reference to a game about Chernobyl in order to picture the aftermath effect. This person also accuses the government of having such a decision based on experiences and newly occurred Fukushima disaster. It is interesting to see that people tend to show more mistrust towards their own governments compared to another country like Russia in previous two examples. However, there are many other entries in which people expressed their negative ideas towards Russians and there, conspiratorial arguments are more visible. The following sub-chapter will investigate narratives related to the paranoid style of politics.

Paranoid Style of Politics and Enemy Narratives

Gürpınar (2020a) states that creating an enemy to put all the blame is a common practice to observe for the Turkish context. Both politicians and people created various narratives depending on their personal beliefs and ideologies in order to strengthen or legitimize their own ideas. Gürpınar (2020b) suggests that the conspiratorial mindset in Turkey was heavily entrenched with the concept of nationalism, especially after the 19th century. This conspiratorial mindset appeared thanks to paranoia and fear. Conspiracies like Western plots became extremely popular, and in time it infused in the political culture. When nationalism and paranoid politics merged, both state authorities and people created narratives to boost their power and support.

The impact of this “enemy” oriented paranoid mindset is visible in narratives related to Akkuyu NPP as well. Scholars named this mindset as the *framing theory* (Moore, 2018). In their work, David Snow and Robert Benford (2000) investigated the influence of framing in the context of social protest. The basis of the theory suggests that media people, or politicians play a huge role in giving additional meanings to certain events. The theory is not about what media and politicians presents but about how they want the audience to perceive the frames to be. This theory was first created by Erwing Goffman (1974) in his work called *Frame Analysis*. Framing is the way a communication source defines and constructs any piece of communicated information. As humans, we all bring our own frames to our communications (Goffman 1974). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the enemy oriented paranoia created by politicians, media and the people for the Turkish context fits well with the framing theory. It is significant to underline that even though the word “framing” has a negative meaning, it does not mean all ideas are wrong. However, it will be possible to see that most comments and entries created an enemy in order to prove its own point. For instance, someone wrote in 2011:

It's a project that makes it clear that the government obviously likes Russian roulette. It's really interesting that the government trusts Russia, which has a reference like Chernobyl, and approves and supports such a large and risky project. Don't let the Russians risk their own country and build a beautiful facility on your land, run it and sell you this energy again, win it, take full responsibility for a disaster.

It is possible to track the impact of the paranoid style of politics in this example. Apparently, the perspective sees the situation from a level where Russians are not trustable. They do not build a power plant in their country instead: they are building it in Turkey because the project is risky, he or she states. The influence of past-experiences, Chernobyl, is visible. The author used that memory as a reference point to strengthen his or her argument against the Akkuyu NPP project.

From the perspective of framing theory, the author pointed at Russia to blame. His or her reasoning constructed on past experiences and happenings. As a result, it created a paranoia towards the Akkuyu NPP. The author shared his or her opinion by framing Russia in this context. On one Facebook group, for the locals that live close to Akkuyu, someone started a conversation by sharing an image (cf. Figure 7). Then he wrote on April, 29 2019:

Yes, to nuclear technology. However, if the nuclear power plant in Akkuyu will be finished, then we will surrender all our Mediterranean coasts to Russians... We will not have the chance to take it back. Approximately in 25 years, there will not be any Turkic nomad and Turkish in Mersin. This agreement is not in favour of Turkey.

Under this post and entry, members of the group shared their ideas. Most comments were targeting Russia. In these comments it is possible to see how Russia is treated as a historical enemy. Even the phrase the author used “we will surrender all our Mediterranean coasts to Russians” is a cross reference to a historical narrative that is very popular in Turkey. The narrative states that Russia’s aim since the very beginning is to control the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, this historical narrative caused paranoia and eventually ended up with this conspiratorial idea.

Data from Facebook Groups

It will be significant to mention that the posts on Facebook groups are slightly different than the entries in Ekşi Sözlük. First, Ekşi Sözlük works like a crowdsourcing dictionary and therefore, authors define the issue mostly. For Facebook posts, people shared their emotions and thoughts on Akkuyu NPP more. Second, since it is a Facebook group, the identity of the members is not anonymous. Being anonymous has a tremendous impact on the result because people might be more careful regarding what they write. Kozinets argues that anonymity makes people share every idea that they have without considering the consequences. On the other hand, when someone's name is visible to the public, we expect it for people to be more careful regarding their posts and comments on social media (2018: 73).

However, regarding conspiracy theories Kozinets argues that people are more comfortable to share their opinions (2018: 186). Conspiracy theories are ideas that cannot be proven (yet) therefore, people feel more comfortable sharing or creating them. In that sense, what I found during my fieldwork might reflect the actual ideas that people have on their mind. However, as a negative side of conducting a netnographic fieldwork, I did not talk with those people and I only analyse texts. Therefore, some analysis that I am going to make might not be accurate since I did not make an interview with the focus group in real life.

Posts related to Akkuyu NPP in two Facebooks groups for locals were easy to find. I used some keywords like “Akkuyu Nükleer”, “Akkuyu” and “Nükleer Enerji” to find comments and discussion in those groups. Since these groups are not only for discussing the nuclear power plant project but for local related issues, people discussed various topics on the page. Therefore, putting keywords in the search bar helped me to gather data easier.

Throughout my research, I noticed people talk about Akkuyu NPP when there is a fresh development regarding the project. They mostly relate these updates to the construction process. However, it was interesting to see while making comments people do not talk only about this recent news but add some conspiratorial narratives. These narratives show similarities with what Ekşi Sözlük authors wrote. In other words, it was

hard to observe any locally created narrative. Most narratives were about framing theory, mistrust and nuclear disasters.

The only difference in local narratives to mention was about the context in some senses. In countrywide blogs, people reacted towards the political decisions regarding Akkuyu NPP. However, for the local context it is possible to see that people were following the construction process closely. Therefore, most posts start with a photo from the construction site or mention the construction. They focused on the political sphere of Akkuyu NPP, but they added this additional perspective to their comments as well.

The Facebook group of people who live in the district was created in 2013, and the first post related to Akkuyu NPP appeared in 2014. The author shared an image. It was showing the Akkuyu region before construction, and under it there was a line. The line says, “*This picture will be history*” referring to the construction process and how this project will damage the coastal line the region. Under this image author wrote that Russians will inhabit in the region and they will build the power plant and run after the construction. The author also stated that Turkish people will get involved only in basic jobs and the region will change after the completion of the nuclear power plant. This post started a huge debate between some members under the comments sections. There were 53 comments in total. One person wrote a huge thread regarding the construction process. He pointed out at many issues including the feasibility of the project, possible environmental threats, and political importance of the Akkuyu NPP. There are two parts from his thread:

When you read the agreement: you see that a complete betrayal. The agreement about power plant declared a surrender towards Russia.

They offered, to Putin, a base in the eastern Mediterranean (for the Russian navy) in exchange for the departure of Assad. The place has become clear. As is known, the Russians still have a naval base in Syria. The new place will be Akkuyu.

The author clearly used a historical grand narrative that is visible since Ottoman times, roughly the 19th century. This grand narrative tells that Russians on to control the Mediterranean Sea and therefore, they can do anything to reach their goals (Keleş 2009). This grand conspiratorial narrative is a result of paranoid style of politics. People connect

every action that government takes to an enemy plot and argue that the real purpose is to destroy the nation.

Another inference we can make in here might be about the concept of trust. The word “betrayal” shows a direct mistrust towards the government and accuses them of siding with the enemy, in this case Russia. It also shows how folk narratives and conspiracy theories appear when the topic is related to nuclear folklore. It might be plausible to argue that for an ordinary construction project, nobody will show their concerns about security. However, a tricky project like nuclear power plant construction will get the attention of conspiracy theories.

In the thread, the author made a connection between Fukushima and Akkuyu. He said, *“You know what happened to Fukushima, the Mediterranean Sea is an inland sea therefore, it might be a suicide to build such a power plant.”* Again, there is a reference to the Fukushima incident and people made a connection between two nuclear power plants and bring a conspiratorial idea expecting Akkuyu NPP is going to explode.

In 2014, same year, someone posted another comment on one post. I cannot reach the image that he or she posted because it is no longer available. Therefore, it is hard to guess what the initial discussion was. However, based on the commentary section, it is possible to see that the post criticized the Akkuyu NPP project. So, one person shared a long comment, and I will share one part in here. The author stated:

...They will not teach nuclear technology to us and it strictly forbids us to enrich uranium (nuclear fuel) ... This is the deal... What a wasted opportunity. If five brothers say YOU are enriching uranium secretly. Even the army and Putin cannot prevent an invasion. In addition, Putin will be a part of the invasion.

In here, not only the conspiracy theories about Akkuyu NPP are visible, but the author used different conspiratorial narratives about “five brothers” or “New World Order”. It is a reference to five countries or families that rule the world. This narrative is not only found in the Turkish context. It is a global phenomenon that can be seen in many countries (Butter 2020: 113). Using this conspiratorial narrative within the context of Akkuyu NPP shows that the nature of conspiratorial thinking in Turkey is about paranoia.

Fearing over an “invasion” here shows how people think that Akkuyu NPP project is not an ordinary case. It is more complex and there is a hidden agenda according to the author.

In his work called *Conspiracy Theories in Turkey: Conspiracy Nation* Doğan Gürpınar argues that this type of *invasion* related narrative is a part of so-called “Neo-Kemalist conspiracy theories”. Historically, he states, the understanding of entire world is against us constituted the Turkish neo-nationalist agenda (Gürpınar 2020a: 45-46). It seems like a vague argument with no proof. However, the conspiratorial scheme was formulated by neo-nationalist elite and they added some historical references to prove that this type of conspiracy is real. Gürpınar states that they published many books that examine the late Ottoman period after 19th century and history of the Turkish Republic in early 20th century. It became a big hit in the country.

This paranoid style of conspiratorial mindset builds on national episteme and historical events. The aftermath of the Turkish War of Independence (1918-1922) plays an important role, as it is mentioned in previous chapters. To evaluate this type of conspiratorial mindset better, it will be crucial to revisit what happened. After Ottoman Empire lost the World War I, the state signed a treaty called Sevres in 1920. The treaty is signed between Allied forces of WWI and the Ottoman Empire. The treaty ceded and divided today’s Turkey to allied forces like France, Italy, Greece, and the United Kingdom. This treaty led the Turkish Independence War (1918-1922). As a result, Turkish Republic was found and claimed its territory.

Nefes (2015) argued that these historical events let the newly formed Turkish nation to form insecurity about towards outsiders. This insecurity and mistrust towards Western and external forces offered a suitable environment for conspiracy theories to prosper. Today, scholars refer to this way of behaviour as the Sevres Syndrome. Nefes states that “The Sevres Syndrome or phobia is the fear of plots by external enemies, especially the Western countries, and their alleged internal collaborators, ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey, to weaken, carve up and terminate the existence of the Turkish Republic” (2015: 9).

Turkish society considers Sevres Treaty as an epitome of the internal and external threats for the nation. This formed a concrete proof which has an enormous impact on both the political culture and the society. Therefore, conspiracy theories in Turkey tend to show insecurity and mistrust towards anything foreign. Medeiros (2018) shared his idea on Sevres with these words: “The idea of historical purpose becomes legitimized through an institutionalized form of knowledge in turn derived from systematizing certain geopolitical narratives, as well as conspiratorial forms of historical thinking commonly referred to as the Sevres-Syndrome” (54).

After the war of independence, the treaty was no longer valid. However, it created a political trauma in Turkish Republican history on the existence of a plot by external forces. In mainstream politics, it is possible to argue that people continuously use this trauma as a way to blame the opponent or legitimize their own actions. That led the Turkish society to develop insecurity towards every political event (Yılmaz, 2006: İnce 2012 and Webb 2011).

Targeting Russia is a common narrative for posts related to Akkuyu NPP. People referred to the Chernobyl incident as a concrete example to prove their criticism. In addition, national security has been at focus. Their arguments developed in a way that they state Russia is planning to plant a bomb or making experiments by building a new generation power plant in Turkey. In both scenarios, the targets are Russia and the Turkish government for making an agreement with Russia.

Here is a post from 2015 in a Facebook group for people who live in Yeşilovacık region. This group is not only for having discussions on Akkuyu NPP but more of a group for people who live in that region. People share and discuss their opinions on various topics, and most of them are about the region. The comment appeared after the ceremony of laying the foundation of the offshore structures of the nuclear power plant in 2015. The comment was extremely detailed and was focusing on official agreements. Also, the author shared his or her ideas on the Akkuyu NPP project. The author divided each topic in titles. The wording she or he used is interesting to analyse. In one part, the author wrote a title: “*Agreement clause where our lands are allocated to the Russians free of charge*”.

The author was showing direct mistrust towards the Turkish government and Russia by writing such a title. In the following part, some conspiratorial narratives are standing out. The author referred to the Chernobyl incident and said, “*Chernobyl: the power plant where Russians blew up while experiments were conducted.*” The author stated Russians were doing another experiment in a very strategic location for Mediterranean Sea in Turkey.”

The Chernobyl tragedy happened in the USSR, but it was consequential for Ukraine and Belarus, which suffered most from radiation contamination. In the future, this incident created an environment for Ukrainian nationalists spread conspiracy theories, arguing that the explosion was on purpose. This discussion on Ukraine and Chernobyl developed, and some even argued that Chernobyl was a planned incident, and the aim was to start a genocide of Ukrainians or Belarussians (Astapova et al. 2020b: 35). These conspiracy theories that developed in another part of the world influenced the mindset in the cited post. It is hard to know whether this person was aware of these conspiracy theories or he or she just ended up with the idea on their its own since I could not ask him or her personally. However, it is plausible to state that the conspiracy belief that this person shared aligns well with conspiracy theories related to Chernobyl in Belarus and Ukraine. The author ended the post with these words:

What about us being forced to sleep next to the most dangerous bomb in the world in our paradise hometown? We never accept being forced to live with this psychological pressure, and we urgently want back our homeland that is given to the Russians!

In here, it is easier to detect the emotions in this post compared to the entries that people shared in Ekşi Sözlük. It might be because this Facebook group is for inhabitants of the region where the government is building the Akkuyu NPP. The author repeated the possibility of Russian control of the region here as well. Taking recent comments into the account, it is possible to observe that there are two concerns about Russians and the situation. First one is about what is presumed so far, the sinister plot of Russia to control the Mediterranean Sea by planting a possible bomb in the region. The second concern is the russification of the region since Russian specialists on nuclear power started to flow to the Akkuyu region when the construction process had started. Here is an example from 2016 in one of the Facebook groups:

In 20-25 years, everywhere will be filled with Russian neighbourhoods, all the plateaus, all the eastern Mediterranean coasts. Thousands of them are preparing for the invasion... not even one of us will be able to stay here. Russians were given a gift.

The perspective towards Russian specialists who are coming to work in the Akkuyu NPP as a possible invasion is a tremendous example of paranoia on losing territories to foreign forces. By indicating that this opportunity is a gift to Russians, it is plausible to state that the trust towards the government is low. The mixture of lack of trust towards the government and historical narrative of Russians as Turkey's enemy or Sevres Syndrome might have influenced the conspiracy mindset that author is showing in here.

Lastly, recent posts and comments in both Ekşi Sözlük and Facebook groups are quite like the previous ones. It is true that the power plant construction has begun however, people are concerned about the possible catastrophic outcome. Interestingly, *Akkuyu Nükleer* company organized some events and funded some organizations in the region. The reaction to these policies by *Akkuyu Nükleer* is quite interesting. In one of the Facebook groups, somebody shared an online newspaper article on how *Akkuyu Nükleer* company donated 140 million Turkish Lira to the health institution in the region in 2020. Another person made a comment under the post and said: *"They will spend this money to the people they will make sick."* It is interesting to see how conspiracy theories related to Akkuyu NPP are not only about the nuclear power plant or the construction itself but cover the policies taken by the company as well. It might be possible to state that Akkuyu NPP project is changing the local mindset and it started to become a part of people's daily life. Therefore, even funding towards health institutions created a suitable environment for conspiracy theories to appear. In here, the conspiracy theory is trying to foresee a possible explosion and its outcomes or the continuous impact of radiation.

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to explore the causing effects of conspiracy theories related to the Akkuyu NPP project. This work explored the cultural, historical, and political roots of conspiracy beliefs that Turkey has developed over centuries. Conspiracy theories for the Turkish context, for example, tend to appear or be visible when there is a lack of trust towards the state or the government. This thesis observed that the roots of conspiracy theories related to Akkuyu developed because of past experiences that people had faced. Some of these past experiences were connected to the phenomenon of lack of trust towards the government and past incidents or debates between politicians and people.

The fieldwork for this thesis gathered data from Facebook groups and Ekşi Sözlük, a countrywide popular blog. Online ethnographic fieldwork has some advantages when it comes to monitoring what people shared and talked about on a specific topic like Akkuyu NPP. In addition, using the keyword searching method makes it easier to reach and find those comments online. Covid 19 restrictions in Turkey made it nearly impossible for this thesis to conduct face-to-face interviews with people. Therefore, some analysis that this thesis did might be debatable. The biggest problem with netnography is that the researcher cannot ask additional questions to elaborate on some comments that people made. This problem with netnography caused this thesis to make interpretations on its own when it comes to the analysis part of the fieldwork material. However, the fieldwork data was beneficial for this thesis to see the roots of the conspiratorial mindset that the society has developed over the years, and it was possible to see how historical, political, cultural, and social events affected it.

For the basis of the Turkish conspiratorial mindset, past experiences like Sevres Agreement plays a considerable role. This agreement shaped the political agenda of politicians, which led to the formation of enemy narratives. It was interesting to see how Turkish politicians blames Westerners for trying to damage the Turkish state by spreading fake reports after the Chernobyl incident. In addition, people got influenced by this narrative as well. This thesis showed many comments and posts where people were suspicious of Russians co-building the Akkuyu NPP.

Examining conspiracy theories related to nuclear powers plants is also interesting since some posts showed that how some conspiracy theories influenced by nuclear disasters that happened in different parts of the world like Fukushima and Chernobyl. Specifically for the Turkish context, this thesis observed how people lost their trust towards the state or the government, on NPPs, after the Chernobyl incident. It was possible to argue that this lack of trust formed a suitable environment for conspiracy theories related to the Akkuyu NPP to appear because there were some commentaries where people recalled what happened in post-Chernobyl Turkey. It is hard to detect at which point the trust towards the Turkish state or government started to decrease however, for Akkuyu, the Chernobyl incident was one of the triggering factors. In the light of these observations, historical and national narratives that Turkey developed in the past influenced the conspiratorial mindset of both the people and politicians. This mindset is highly related to the lack of trust. In addition, paranoia towards external forces by the people and the state itself adds additional layers to the Akkuyu NPP construction process. As a result, people start to focus on the political or conspiratorial sides of the construction instead of discussing on environmental issues that the nuclear power plant might cause. This shift from an environment-based discussion towards a political one affects state policies and advertisement campaigns as well. The advertisement campaigns by Akkuyu Nükleer Company showed that how the focus topic is not only the environment but about security and solidarity of the nation. So, it was possible to state that conspiracy theories related to the Akkuyu NPP were affected by country's politics, culture, history, and past incidents.

Finally, this research demonstrated how conspiracy theories related to Akkuyu NPP have a complex root. Accordingly, the concept of conspiracy theories and conspiracy beliefs should be expanded with more case-specific studies like Akkuyu NPP. Applying interviews and online-based fieldworks would help this field to observe and detect the roots of conspiracy narratives better. Learning more about the roots of conspiracy theories with case studies will contribute to the field and it will be possible to see the common patterns between conspiratorial mindsets that each country or region has.

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Resümee

Türgi Akkuyu tuumaelektrijaama rajamine: vandenõuteooriate mõju riigi ja rahva suhetele

Magistritöö keskendub Türki Mersini linna rajatava Akkuyu tuumaelektrijaamaga seotud vandenõuteooriatele ja nende tekkepõhjustele. Tegemist on esimese tuumaelektrijaamaga riigis üldse ja see on plaanis avada 2023. aastal. Võttes aluseks veebifoorumite postitused, seab väitekiri eesmärgiks vastata järgmistele küsimustele: kuidas tekivad vandenõuteooriad Akkuyu tuumaelektrijaamaga seoses? millised tegurid käivitavad vandenõuliku mõtteviisi ja kujundavad seda? kuidas mõjutavad vandenõuteooriaid Türgi ajalugu, poliitiline kultuur ja ühiskonnakorraldus?

Kuigi vandenõuteooriate ja tuumaelektrijaamade kohta on ilmunud mitmeid käsitusi ning Akkuyu tuumajaama on vaadeldud poliitikaanalüüsi ja keskkonnamurede vaatepunktist, ei ole Akkuyuga seotud vandenõuteooriaid varem uuritud.

Väitekirja esimene peatükk avab Akkuyu aatomielektrijaama rajamise taustu ja ehitusprotsessi, annab ülevaate vandenõuteooriate uurimisloost ning käsitleb lähemalt folkloori, vandenõuteooriate ja tuumaenergia suhteid. Ühtlasi vaadeldakse esimeses peatükis Türgi poliitilist kultuuri ja sellega seotud levinumaid ajaloolisi vandenõuteooriaid.

Et töö põhineb veebis kogutud empiirilisele ainesele, keskendub teine peatükk vandenõuteooriatele internetis ja tutvustab netnograafia nime all tuntuks saanud metodoloogiat, mida kasutati magistritöö tarbeks kahes Facebooki grupis ja ühes üleriigilises internetifoorumis tehtud välitöödeks.

Kolmandas peatükis esitatud analüüsi tulemused osutavad Akkuyu tuumaelektrijaamaga seotud vandenõuteooriate komplekssetele juurtele ja nende tõukumisele Türki elanike varasematest kogemustest, mida on iseloomustanud rahva ja poliitikute vahelise usalduse kadumine või puudumine. Lisaks täheldatakse, et vandenõuteooriad Akkuyu tuumaelektrijaama kohta kipuvad esile kerkima ja levima siis, kui mujal maailmas toimub mõni tuumaelektrijaamaga seotud sündmus või vahejuhtum, mis näitab, kuidas tuumaelektrijaamasid ja tuumenergeetikat käsitlevad narratiivid üksteist mõjutavad. Erilist rolli omab siin Tšornobõli juhtum.

ANNEX 1. Tables and Figures



Figure 1: The advertisement was titled “Powerful Turkey’s Safe Energy”. The poster is a part of advertisement campaign initiated by Akkuyu Nükleer Company in 2015.



Figure 2: Hürriyet newspaper's cover page on 30th of April 1986 with the title "Deadly clouds are on us, nuclear alarm". They put this cover to emphasize the catastrophic impact of the incident in Chernobyl on Turkey.

EVREN: "Bize radyasyondan, madyasyondan bir şey olmaz"

ÖZAL: "Azıcık radyasyonlu çay, sağlığa faydalı"

Zirveden radyasyon sakası



- Günün başlıca konularından "çayda radyasyon" tartışmasına, Cumhurbaşkanı ile Başbakan arasındaki espriler, hoşgörülü bir bakış açısı getirdi.
- Çankırı'daki tesisin açılışı sırasında Evren ıhlamur, Özal ise çay içerken, "radyasyon" konusu açıldı. Cumhurbaşkanı, gülümseyerek, "Midem rahatsız... Onun için ıhlamur içiyorum" dedi ve ekledi: "Vücudumuz her şeye alışmış... Radyasyondan madyasyondan bize bir şey olmaz..."
- Özal da, çayını yudumlarken, "Korkmadan çay içilebilir" dedi ve bunu şöyle açıkladı: "Radyasyonlu çay, lezzetli oluyor..."

21.sayfada

Top fabrikası açılışında şeker fabrikası vaadi

- Çankırı Uçaksavar Top Fabrikası'nın açılışında Başbakan Özal, Çankırılılara bir de "şeker fabrikası" müjdesi verdi.

21.sayfada

ÇAYLI SOHBET Cumhurbaşkanı Kenan Evren, Çankırı'da onuruna verilen öğle yemeğinden sonra ıhlamur içmek isteyince, Başbakan Özal kendisine "çayda radyasyon" iddialarını hatırlattı.

DONKU HÜRRIYET

358.901	- İstanbul	Maksimum
221.385	- Ankara	
94.405	- İzmir	
85.815	- Adana	
57.905	- Eskişehir	
525.915	- Adet başına	

MİLYAR

Figure 3: Hürriyet newspaper's title on 7th of December 1986 showing how the prime minister, at that time, Turgut Özal, and President Kenan Evren mocked the reports on how the radiation coming from Chernobyl is dangerous for Turkey.

(Kampanyaya katılan her 200 kişiden biri)

GÜNAYDIN

Veb Ofset İleri Matbaacılık A.Ş. adına sahibi:
HALDUN SİMAVI

Yazı İşleri Müdürü
TURGAY VARDAR

Sorumlu Müdür
İNAN GÖKSEL

Müessese Müdürü
KEMAL KINACI

Reklam ve Dış İlişkiler Md.
BİLGİN ŞENTAY

Atom Enerjisi Kurumu Başkanı Profesör Yüksel Özemre açıkladı:

"Türkiye için tehlike yok"

Sovyetler Birliği' nin Kiev kentinde meydana gelen nükleer patlama sonucu yayılan radyasyonun Türkiye' yi etkileme ihtimalinin zayıf olduğu belirtildi

Profesör Dr. Yüksel Özemre, Karadeniz sahilleri ile Boğaz'da yapılmakta olan radyasyon taramalarında bir artışın tespit edilmediğini söyledi.

Doğu Avrupa ülkeleri, İsviçre ve Almanya ile radyasyon konusunda bilgi alış veriş yapıldığını söyleyen Türkiye Atom Enerjisi Kurumu Başkanı, Birleşmiş Milletler bünyesinde kurulu olan Uluslararası Atom Enerjisi Ajansı'na da bağlı olduklarını belirtti.

Yazısı 6'nıncı sayfa

İzmir'de radyasyon ölçümü: "Sıfır"

Ege Üniversitesi Nükleer Bilimler Enstitüsü bahçeğinde yapılan radyasyon ölçümünden sonra konuşan Enstitü Müdürü Selman Kınacı, "Telatlanmaya hiç sebep yok. Sovyetler Birliği'nin Çernobil Nükleer Santrali'ndeki kaza bizi etkilemeyecek" dedi.

Haber 6'nıncı sayfa

Bursa üç kişi

Bursa ve çevresinde yapılan ölçümler ölüm tehlikesi olmadığını gösterdi. Bursa'da yapılan ölçümler ölüm tehlikesi olmadığını gösterdi.

Figure 4: Günaydın newspaper's article that shows how Turkish officials denies the reports coming from the Western sources regarding the radioactive danger caused with the explosion in Chernobyl.



Figure 5: Milliet's article on how the minister of industry and commerce of Turkey drank tea in front of journalists to show that it is safe to consume.



Figure 6: Günaydın newspaper's article showing what the minister of industry and commerce of Turkey stated about people that says there is radiation in Turkey after the Chernobyl incident. He said that "People who say Turkey has radiation are atheists."

Rusya bu kez de dünyanın
başına yüzer nükleer santral
bela edecek. Rosatom
St. Petersburg'tan Baltık denizine
doğru hareket planlıyor.



Nükleere Hayır!!!

Figure 7: One person shared it in the Facebook group, it is written that: “This time Russia will cause troubles to world with floating nuclear power plants. ROSATOM is planning to send the power plant from St. Petersburg to the Baltic Sea. No to nuclear power!”

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15/05/2021